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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: REACTION TO 2007 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
REPORT

¶1. (U) Government reaction. On September 20, 2007, Emboff presented a copy of the International Religious Freedom (IRF) report text to Irakli Machitidze, the U.S. desk officer in the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and offered to address any questions or concerns. Machitidze noted with satisfaction the report's conclusion that the situation for freedom of religion in Georgia has for the most part improved, and promised to continue monitoring the issues that the report identified as needing further improvement. Machitidze noted that the report addressed issues of ethnic and religious minority conditions that had potential to adversely affect US aid to Georgia, and said that the conclusions of this year's report should not warrant attachment of conditions to assistance or the curtailment of any specific assistance programs.

¶2. (U) Media reaction. Media reaction to the report's release was muted. Most Georgian media outlets reported the release as a major but not a lead item. A popular TV news interview show featured U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Mark X. Perry in an interview concerning the report, and gave him and the report a respectful reception.

¶3. (U) Social reaction. The report did not lead to any mass demonstrations or protests in reaction. No press releases, inquiries, or letters were received by the US Embassy regarding the report. The release of the report coincided with, but was not linked to, a brief media controversy over a conservative parliamentarian's proposal to assign Orthodox priests to state classrooms. That proposal was not backed by the present Georgian government, and did not result in legislation. The proposal was made after this year's report was released.

TEFFT